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ABSTRACT

Data from a language development project at the Polytechnic of Wales were used to compare the speech and writing of 48 monolingual English-speaking children. The 48 children came from three groups, aged 8, 10, and 12. For the collection of spoken data, the children, divided into groups of three, were tape recorded while they made a construction out of Lego bricks. They were then interviewed individually and asked to describe what they had made and to talk about other games they played. For the writing task, the children had to write about the Lego construction they had built. The spoken data yielded eight different oral constructions--all of which occur in the spontaneous speech of adults: the clause initiator, "well"; the use of "this" and "these" for specific indefinite reference; the recapitulatory pronoun; colloquial uses of "like," "sort of," and "kind of"; the tag statement; and amplificatory noun phrase tag. All of the constructions, apart from the recapitulatory pronoun, showed an increase from age 8 to 10. Interestingly, many children learned to avoid specifically oral constructions in their writing by about the age of ten, and some had begun to use specific literary constructions in their writing that did not occur in their spontaneous speech. (HOD)

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# Grammatical differentiation between speech and writing in children aged 8 to 12

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ABSTRACT

It is often suggested that children "write as they speak". This paper attempts to show that many children have learnt to avoid specifically oral constructions in their writing by about the age of ten, and that a few have begun to use in their writing specifically literary constructions that do not occur in their spontaneous speech. These findings have implications both for the teaching of writing and for theories of language acquisition.

## Introduction

Primary school teachers often complain that their pupils 'write as they speak'. In an earlier study (Perera, in press), I attempted to show that, in fact, young children's writing shows more evidence of differentiation from their speech than that lament would suggest. The study took published corpora of data and compared the speech of 53 twelve-year-olds with the writing of 28 twelve-year-olds and 48 nine-year-olds. This comparison yielded some useful information but, because of the way the data were presented, it had the limitation that it was not possible to compare the same children as both speakers and writers. Therefore, this paper presents a smaller follow-up study, comparing the speech and writing of 48 monolingual English-speaking children in Wales. The data come from a language development project at the Polytechnic of Wales: the speech samples are published (Fawcett & Perkins, 1980); the writing samples by the same children are, as yet, unpublished.[1] The 48 children come from three groups, aged eight, ten and twelve, with sixteen in each group; each contains eight boys and eight girls, from four different 'classes of family background'.[2]

For the collection of the spoken data, the children were tape-recorded as, in groups of three, they made a construction out of Lego bricks. They were then interviewed individually by Michael Perkins, who asked them to describe what they had made and to talk about other games they played. For the writing task, the children had to write about the Lego construction they had built.

The data for this study come from a grammatical analysis of the first three pages of the transcript of the adult-child interview for all 48 children and from an analysis of the 48 pieces of writing they produced. So the corpus consists of language samples from the same

children talking and writing about the same topic. It is a small amount of data, on a limited topic, so the findings can only be tentative but, because they are generally in accord with the results of the earlier, larger study, I believe they may have some general applicability.

## Constructions typical of spoken language

Differentiation between speech and writing by children works in two ways. On the one hand, as they get older they use in their writing grammatical constructions that are more advanced than those they use in their speech (O'Donnell, Griffin & Norris, 1967); on the other hand, they use in their speech an increasing proportion of specifically oral constructions. This section will examine the oral constructions that the children in the study used in their speech, because such an examination throws some light on what they are doing in their writing.

Excluded from the analysis are all those constructions that are heavily dependent on the situation in which the speech occurs: deictic items like this, that, here and there, that the children use when they point to things in the room; expressions like you know, isn't it and all other question forms, since they seem to require the presence of a listener; and the false starts, redundant repetitions and ungrammatical sequences that are a result of the pressures of producing spontaneous speech. Even after excluding all of these, there are still in the spoken data eight different constructions that we think of as characteristically oral. In the examples that follow, the name and age of the speaker are given, together with the volume and page reference in Fawcett and Perkins (1980). Although the oral constructions are illustrated from the speech of children, it is important to emphasize that all these expressions occur frequently in the spontaneous speech of adults - there is nothing immature about them.

The first is the clause initiator well. This is so familiar that it needs only one example:

(1) 'well I de'cided to put the garage on/
Andrew, 8 yrs, II, 24

This is by far the most common oral expression in the data. Between them, the 48 children use 137 instances of well. The next most frequent type of oral construction is the use of this and these for specific indefinite reference; that is, when the speaker has a specific person or object in mind which has not yet been introduced to the listener. (This use is different from deictic this, because it is not referring to something physically present in the situation.) For example,

(2) well there's 'this bumpety thing/
Sarah, 8 yrs, II, 57

(3) they 'had to run 'under this 'dark tunnel/
Rachael, 10 yrs, III, 59

(4) it's 'got 'these 'things that 'catch the marbles/
Peter, 12 yrs, IV, 20

In more formal contexts, including writing, this and these would be replaced by a and some, e.g. 'They had to run under a dark tunnel', 'It's got some things that catch the marbles.'

The third type of oral construction is the group of 'vague completers'. They include expressions like or something:

(5) it 'might be a 'children's home or something/
Andrew, 8 yrs, II, 24

and an all that, as in,

(6) we was 'looking for pieces an all that/
Neil, 10 yrs, III, 182

They have been described in studies by Dines (1979) and Scott (1983) under the general heading of and stuff. The most famous adult use of one of

these vague completers was probably in the film where Groucho Marx said to his leading lady, 'Let's get married or something' and she replied, 'Let's get married or nothing'. Sadly, the example of or nothing at (7) is not a witty riposte but simply a non-standard version of or anything:

(7) they 'wouldn't let him out or nothing/
Sarah, 12 yrs, IV, 306

These completers seem to be used when the speaker feels that more could be said but that perhaps it is unnecessary to be more explicit. There is quite a range used by the children, from the highly colloquial and that to the more formal and things like that.

The fourth category is the recapitulatory pronoun. In this construction, the speaker uses a noun phrase at the beginning of the sentence and then abandons it syntactically, filling its grammatical slot with a pronoun, e.g.

(8) well my 'nan 'she got some books/ from the library/
Sharon, 8 yrs, II, 266

(9) well/ Neil/ you know/ he 'started 'building a well he 'put the 'bottom of the 'house by there/
Jason, 10 yrs, III, 193

(10) 'this man/ he ... was 'selling icecreams/
Jane, 12 yrs, IV, 220

In more formal styles, the initial noun phrase would serve as the subject of the sentence and the pronoun would not appear at all, e.g. 'My nan got some books from the 'library.'

The next set of examples features the word like. There are uses of like which are perfectly normal in non-colloquial contexts, e.g. 'She looks like her mother'. The only instances included here are those like (11) and (12) which are clearly not part of the formal language:

(11) we were 'going to make 'like a 'big 'house with a porch/
Martyn, 10 yrs, III, 87

(12) 'like there's 'these two 'rubber bands/
Peter, 12 yrs, IV, 20

Similarly, sort of and kind of have both a neutral and a markedly colloquial use. The neutral use is where the meaning is 'a type of', e.g. 'Stilton is a sort of cheese'. In this use, the expressions occur between a determiner and a noun. It is not always possible with the construction, 'It's a sort of X', to tell whether it is being used literally or colloquially. Therefore, conservatively, all such constructions are excluded from the analysis, leaving only those like (13) and (14) that are clearly colloquial:

(13) we 'kind of 'lean on a tree/
Richard, 8 yrs, II, 237

(14) we 'sort of ran out of these/
Rachael, 10 yrs, III, 57

Another type of oral construction is the tag statement, which speakers seem to use for emphasis:

(15) it's the 'one we 'do in jazz band/ it is/
Nicola, 8 yrs, II, 171

(16) it's hard it is/
Neil, 10 yrs, III, 182

(17) 'that was 'going to 'be like a danger spot/ that was/
Martyn, 12 yrs, IV, 185

The last of these oral constructions is the amplificatory noun phrase tag. In this construction, the speaker uses a pronoun first and then, as if aware that the reference of the pronoun may not be clear to the listener, adds an explanatory noun phrase at the end:

(18) we 'sort of ran out of these/ 'these the 'red bricks sort of thing/
Rachael, 10 yrs, III, 57

(19) the 'girl who called her 'sister out of it/ the 'fire
Andrea, 12 yrs, IV, 250

Table 1 gives the occurrence of these oral constructions in the corpus of children's speech. In order to take account of the different number of words used by each age group (given at the top of the table) all the figures are presented as occurrences per hundred words; the actual number of instances is given in brackets. The figures for the totals reveal the most striking aspect of this analysis: that there is a dramatic increase in the use of these colloquial constructions between the ages of 8 and 10, from 1.86 per 100 words to 3.46, an increase of 86%. All of the constructions, apart from the recapitulatory pronoun, show an increase from age 8 to 10. Those that reveal the greatest gain are: the tag statement, vague completers, well, and this and these.

TABLE 1 GOES ABOUT HERE

The figures in the table provide evidence that, far from dying out of children's speech, oral constructions are becoming much more prominent. The fact that they hardly occur in writing is, therefore, that much more remarkable. Because that is the case. In the 48 pieces of writing produced by these same children, there are only two examples - both in the same sentence:

(20) We used these sort of tiles for the roof.
Bryan, 12 yrs.

This can be contrasted with the 283 instances in speech, produced by 45 of the 48 children. The virtual absence of oral constructions in the children's writing is not a freak result: in 90 unpublished pieces of writing by 9-year-olds in the Bristol Language Development Project there are only these three examples:[3]

(21) Well have a guess
Mary, 9 years

(22) But then he saw this elephant.
Philip, 9 years

(23) These men were cannibals.

Philip, 9 years

It is tempting to think that there is something in the constructions themselves that inhibits their use in writing. But a search through many hundreds of pieces of children's writing does produce occasional examples - and indeed adults sometimes use them in personal letters in order to establish a warm, friendly tone of voice. Here, from a variety of sources, are examples of some colloquial constructions occurring exceptionally, in writing:

(24) When we arrived at Dover we saw the white cliffs and everything.

12 yrs, Handscombe, (1967) 42

(25) The boy's father he has a job and family to take care.

Adult, Shaughnessy, (1977) 67

(26) We arrived on top of a flat hill kind of.

12 yrs, Handscombe, (1967) 56

(27) In the morning they both went out, the two eldest.

11 yrs, Burgess et al., (1973) 124

(28) The skin has got like pimples on.

11 yrs, Rosen & Rosen, (1973) 134

So there is nothing inherent in these constructions which prohibits their use in writing; rather, children have learnt, highly successfully, that they are not a normal part of written language. They can only have learnt this from the reading they do, and from the stories that they have had read to them. This means that, as young as eight (almost as soon as they can write independently), children are differentiating the written from the spoken language and are not simply writing down what they would say.

There are a number of reasons why we may not always be aware, perhaps, of the amount of learning that is involved in children's avoidance of these constructions in their writing. First, it is a negative virtue to leave something erroneous out - we are more conscious of errors that are present than of signs of learning marked only by absence.

Secondly, as adults we are so used to written language that we think it is somehow 'natural' that these constructions do not occur; whereas, in fact, such knowledge can be acquired only through considerable exposure to written language. And thirdly, we are probably not aware of how frequent these constructions are in speech: they rarely feature in grammatical descriptions and when they do get mentioned it may be in disparaging terms, as if they are errors of some kind.

Constructions typical of written language

We can now consider the written texts in the corpus, because the other side of the differentiation coin is children's use in their writing of constructions that occur rarely or never in their speech. There are two main reasons why writers use structures that are uncommon in speech: first, they are able to use psycholinguistically complex constructions because, unlike speakers, they have plenty of planning time; speakers who spend too long planning their utterances tend to be interrupted and to lose their speaking turn altogether. Also, writers can pause in the middle of a construction without losing their way because the first part is already safely trapped on the page and can be re-read as often as necessary. (However, re-reading while writing is a skill that has to be learned. Research by Graves (1979) shows that beginning writers do not take advantage of the physical presence of their chosen words but rather compose additively, word or phrase at a time, often with disjointed results. So it is not surprising that some of the more demanding constructions, which will probably require the young writer to re-read while composing, do not appear with any frequency in children's writing until the age of ten or twelve.)

The second reason for the occurrence of specifically literary constructions in writing is that writers have a need for grammatical

variety. This necessity arises from one of the most fundamental differences between speech and writing - the fact that writing cannot convey the expressive features of the spoken voice. Speakers can vary their rate, volume, pitch height, rhythm and intonation patterns, partly to relieve their speech of monotony but also to place emphasis appropriately on the important parts of the message. Because writers have none of this variety available, repetitive grammatical patterns are more noticeable and more boring in writing than they are in speech. So, to achieve a pleasing style, writers have to vary their grammatical constructions. Writers also need to manipulate grammatical structure in order to get the emphasis in the right place. It is possible to indicate emphasis in writing by underlining, or capitalization but such devices are not approved of in formal styles and, interestingly, none of the children used them.

Another difference between speech and writing is that writing is, on the whole, more formal than speech. We have already seen that children reveal an early awareness of this by their avoidance of informal constructions in writing. In addition, a few of the older children in the sample use in their writing some notably formal constructions that do not occur at all in their speech at this age, e.g.

(29) When one person had finished he sent for the next one, and so on.

Huw, 10 yrs.

(30) We used blocks to make a fridge, beds etc.

Stuart, 12 yrs.

These examples seem to be formal equivalents of the vague completers used in speech. In his spoken account, Stuart uses a vague completer for a similar purpose:

(31) we ... 'put in 'pieces of Lego/ for 'different objects/ 'like a fridge or something/

Stuart, 12 yrs, IV, 26

His selection of etc. in writing, rather than or something, shows a sensitivity to the different requirements of the two modes. At (32), Peter attempts an appositive noun phrase:

(32) We had the test in the Library and we (Alan and Stewart) made a house.

Peter, 12 yrs.

In speech, such an idea may well be expressed by an amplificatory noun phrase, tagged on at the end of the sentence: we made a house - Alan and Stewart and me. It is apparent that Peter does not get the formal construction quite right; in his brackets he should have written, 'Alan and Stewart and I' but, of course, mistakes are especially likely to occur in a construction that is new to the user and still in process of being acquired. Such errors can be seen as a sign of growth.

One aspect of the formality of writing is the tendency to make the links between ideas more explicit than would be necessary in speech. Sharon demonstrates this with her use of for instance:

(33) We kept adding different ideas, for instance, kitchen windows, gates, trees, doors.

Sharon, 10 yrs.

In speech, such specification is often simply added, without any overt indicator of the relationship. Sharon's friend, Janet, provides an example of the typically implicit spoken form as they play with the Lego together:

(34) well 'you got some 'funny idéas/gátes/shútters/

Janet, 10 yrs, III, 242

Another type of linguistic formality is illustrated by ten-year-old Richard in a letter about his Lego construction:

(35) If you meet an architect interested in our farm we would willingly give him or her the plans.

He shows here that he can use the singular pronoun after a non-specific singular noun. That this is a rather formal construction is apparent

from the fact that, colloquially, many adults would use the plural them instead - we would willingly give them the plans. In addition, Richard seems surprisingly mature in being aware that if he had used generic he and written, we would willingly give him the plans, he could have been accused of sexism.

As well as being more formal than speech, writing also tends to be less redundant. One of the grammatical ways in which redundancy is decreased is by the use of non-finite rather than finite subordinate clauses. There are some types of clause that are normally non-finite, even in speech - for example, adverbial clauses of purpose (e.g. He went home to rest.) But most non-finite adverbial clauses are more typical of written than spoken language, e.g.

(36) After constructing the kitchen I started on the car.
Janet, 10 yrs.

(37) Janet had the most amusing idea of building a multi-coloured wall, first of all using red, then blue, then yellow.
Sharon, 10 yrs.

The finite version of the adverbial in (36) would be:

(38) After I had constructed the kitchen I started on the car.

Similarly, non-finite relative clauses are generally more common in writing than in speech. Examples (39) to (41) show how some of the children use them in writing:

(39) I was one of the children chosen to take part in the project.
Sian, 10 yrs.

(40) We made the windmill out of ten Lego bricks piled on top of each other.
Ann-Marie, 12 yrs.

(41) Amanda's house had one little person walking up to the front door.
Heidi, 12 yrs.

The more redundant, more speech-like version of (39), for example, would be:

(42) I was one of the children who were chosen to take part in the project.

In the corpus studied there were approximately twice as many of these two non-finite constructions in the children's writing as in their speech.

TABLE 2 GOES ABOUT HERE.

The figures are given in Table 2. The difference between the two modes is much more marked in the 12-year-olds than in the two younger age-groups, suggesting that the children are becoming increasingly aware that lower redundancy is preferable in written style and are acquiring the grammatical means that enable them to achieve it.

We know that writing lacks the intonation features of speech. An important function of intonation is to signal the focus of information in a clause. The unmarked position for the focus is the end of the clause, where we most often put those parts of the message that are either new or important, or both. However, any part of the clause can be made prominent by the speaker; but the writer, in contrast, generally has to make sure that the focus of information coincides with the end of the clause. If the normal clause order of subject, verb and complementation will not achieve end-focus, then there are grammatical devices the writer can use. One is to move a normally-final place adverbial to the front of the sentence, as in (43) and (44):

(43) On top there was a chimney.
Gary, 8 yrs.

(44) Outside the garden I put a little bus-stop sign.
Kathryn, 10 yrs.

For Kathryn, at (44), the little bus-stop sign is the most important part of the sentence. If, more prosaically, she had written, I put a little bus-stop sign outside the garden, it would have been hidden in the middle of the sentence and would have lost its prominence. In example (45),

there are two kinds of word-order alteration:

(45) By the side of it we put a bus-stop where stood two children.

Sian, 12 yrs.

In the first clause there is another instance of adverbial fronting, which allows the focus to fall on the new information, a bus-stop; and in the second clause the verb is fronted, causing the subject, two children, to occur, unusually, at the end of the sentence. The result is rather awkward but it does show that Sian is striving to achieve effects which she knows can be obtained.

For writers, then, the last position in the clause is the most salient. The next most important position is the beginning. The first element in the clause, the point of departure for the utterance, is called by many grammarians, including Quirk et al. (1972:945), the theme. The skilful handling of successive themes is essential in writing because a major way in which written and spoken language differ is that the writer, unlike the speaker, has to produce a sustained, coherent discourse, without help or intervention from a conversational partner. This means that sentences have to have a structure which is not only internally consistent but which also links smoothly with the preceding text. The theme generally expresses given information - information that has already been introduced. If new material keeps appearing at the beginning of clauses, the result is a very jerky disjointed passage which is uncomfortable to read. So, being able to maintain thematic continuity is a necessary skill for a writer. At (46) and (47) there are examples that show these young writers using unusual grammatical constructions in order to maintain continuity. Kathryn links the second sentence in (46) to the first by taking up the theme of the garden:

(46) While Louise and Rachael built the bungalow, I made a start on the garden. In the garden were two trees and around the garden I placed a fence.

Kathryn, 10 yrs.

If she had written, two trees were in the garden, she would have had new material at the beginning of the clause, and given material at the end - the reverse of the pattern she needs. By using adverbial fronting, she is able to achieve thematic continuity and appropriate end-focus at the same time. In (47), Stuart clearly wants we to be the theme of his second sentence (taking up the idea, two other boys and myself, from the first):

(47) Last Monday the 3rd two other boys and myself did a test for the Polytechnic of Wales, building with lego bricks. We were given a choice, we could either build a small individual thing ourselves or build one big thing all together.

Stuart, 12 yrs.

To achieve his chosen theme, he uses a passive verb phrase: we were given the choice. If he had used the active verb phrase which would be more likely in speech, he would have had to write something like, A man called Mr. Perkins gave us a choice, which would have introduced a new and unwanted theme.

On the whole, most of the children in the sample are very good at maintaining thematic continuity in their writing; but to show what can go wrong, here is the opening of one of the very few pieces that are less successful in this regard (each theme is italicized):

(48) The house was big and I lived in it. But the bridge was big. The gate and a door was red and the cars were blue. The dog and the pig were pink.

Sharon, 8 yrs.

In six clauses each theme is new, with not one taking up an idea already mentioned. The stilted language this produces seems strangely reminiscent of some reading schemes.

A much more common problem occurs when thematic continuity is maintained by repeating the same theme over and over again. This gives thematic continuity without thematic variety, e.g.

(49) I made a garden with flowers in it. I did a fence. I was going to do a bus stop. I did a table outside and a chair. I put a cake on the table. I put an egg on the table.

Jennifer, 8 yrs.

Such repetition of a pronominal theme is common and unremarkable in speech:

(50) well/ we de'cided 'first of all/ to 'do the house/
'so we 'started to 'build the house/
and we 'thought we'd 'make a 'little garden/to go with it/
and we 'thought we'd 'have some people/

Sheryl, 10, III, 289

However, to be successful, a writer has to create thematic variety while maintaining thematic continuity and getting the focus in the right place. At (51) and (52) there are examples which suggest that their writers might be aware of the need for thematic variety.

(51) We used blocks to make a fridge, beds etc. We then built the roof which was flat. We then put a fence round and put a tree and flowers and made a garden. A bus stop was put outside.

Stuart, 12 yrs.

(52) We built the house because it was very simple and we had a lot of bricks to build it with. Around the house we put a fence and three gates in it. We built a bus stop outside the house with three people waiting for a bus. Inside the fence we put two trees.

Sarah, 12 yrs.

Stuart has used we three times and then starts the fourth sentence with a bus stop. This is not entirely successful since it sounds rather clumsy; and, being new information, a bus stop really needs to go later in the clause.

But if Stuart had not used the passive and had written instead, we put a bus stop outside, he would have repeated we for the fourth time. His choice of an unusual construction indicates perhaps that he is becoming sensitive to some aspects of the overall structure of a piece of writing. Sarah, in (52), manages rather better by using fronted place adverbials. Around the house and inside the fence both take up ideas already mentioned so thematic continuity is maintained. If she had used normal sentence order, all five main clauses in this extract would have begun with we. Some of the older writers in the sample show that they are able to sustain both thematic continuity and thematic variety over several sentences, e.g.

(53) In the Lego boxes there were hundreds of different pieces. Some had only one hole. Others went up to twelve. They had arch shapes, straight lines and some had a circle shape. Nearly everything was used to make our mansion.
Ann-Marie, 12 yrs.

From examples (43) to (53), it is apparent that end focus, thematic continuity and thematic variety are interrelated. So when an unusual construction, such as adverbial fronting, is used, it is rarely possible to associate it definitively with just one of the three stylistic factors. Adult writers use a number of grammatical constructions to achieve focus, continuity and variety. (A description is given in Perera 1984, Chapters 4 and 5.) In this corpus of data, there are three that seem to be being used by the children for these stylistic purposes, though it is important to stress that there is no suggestion that the children are consciously aware either of the effects or of the means they use to achieve them. The three discourse-structuring constructions they use are passive verb phrases, fronted place adverbials and re-ordered clause constituents. Although these constructions do occur in their speech, they are much less common than in their writing; the figures are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3 GOES ABOUT HERE.

The figures for speech do not alter very much from the age of 8 to 12, whereas for writing they increase considerably from 8 to 10 and more than double between 10 and 12. This suggests that by the age of twelve, at least some children are becoming aware of the grammatical resources they can exploit in their writing. Some of the children make errors in using the literary constructions; this underlines the fact that these new forms are still in the process of being acquired. For example, the repetition of the adverbials in (54) and (55) indicates a certain lack of faith in the fronted versions:

(54) And in the garden I put little seeds in it.
Nicola, 8 yrs.

(55) In the front of it we put a tree there.
Sian, 12 yrs.

The figures in Tables 2 and 3 give the occurrence of typically written constructions across whole age groups. Like this, it is not possible to see how far they reflect typical usage for the group and how far they derive from just a few exceptional subjects. Therefore, Table 4 shows how many children out of the 16 in each age group are using in their writing the three main types of literary construction that have been described.

TABLE 4 GOES ABOUT HERE

The figures show there is an increase, with age, in the number of children using the constructions, not just in the number of constructions being used.

It is necessary to emphasize that there is no intrinsic merit in the constructions that have been illustrated: they are valuable only in so far as they enable writers to express their intentions more clearly, concisely and elegantly than they could have done without them. Further,

I do not believe there is any value in teachers setting exercises for children to make finite clauses non-finite, to move place adverbials to the fronts of sentences, or to turn active sentences into passives. The use of these constructions will be learned most naturally by reading, and by drafting and redrafting sustained pieces of writing.

We know that for a written text to be successful it is necessary for there to be links between sentences. But such links alone are not sufficient. It is possible to make up pseudo-discourses where each sentence is linked impeccably to the preceding one and yet there is a lack of global coherence. Writers have to impose an overall pattern of organisation on their work as well as taking care of local connections between sentences. (There is some evidence (Atwell 1981) that global coherence is harder to achieve.) The global structure may be chronological, spatial, logical or a combination of these. It is well known that the chronological pattern is by far the easiest and is the one that young writers use most often. Many of the children in the sample organize their account of making a Lego construction in a chronological way. Table 5 lists the time adverbials that they use as one means of achieving this overall structural coherence. The most striking thing is the much greater variety of adverbials in the written accounts. In speech they

TABLE 5 GOES ABOUT HERE

often sequence their actions simply with <u>and</u> or <u>then</u>, e.g.

(56) well we 'started to make the hóuse/ then we 'thought that it would 'be a bit bìg/ ... 'then we 'started just to 'build that bit/ the 'little hóuse/ and 'then we all thought 'well we 'might as well 'put a gàrage there/ on the síde/ and 'then we 'found all the fẽncing/ so we de'cided to have the fẽnce/ and the trées/ and 'then we had the dóor/

Suzanne, 12 yrs, IV, 207

There are written accounts rather like that from some of the 8-year-olds but generally the 10- and 12-year-olds use a wider range of structuring devices. Again, there seems to be a realization among the older children that special effort is needed to establish a coherent written text.

I have already suggested that we may not notice that children are editing oral constructions out of their writing. Similarly, we may not be aware that they are using in their writing constructions that they rarely use orally. The reason for this is chiefly that they are such simple constructions that educated adults probably use many of them in spontaneous speech. But it seems fair to hypothesize that it is the pressure writing imposes to produce an extended, coherent piece of language that forces children to start experimenting with these constructions. As the new forms of language become more familiar, and as a widening range of speech situations present themselves, then young people may extend their oral repertoire by 'borrowing' some of their newly-acquired literary constructions when the need for them arises.

This small-scale study has shown that even though the language of children's writing at the age of 12 may still seem simple and speech-like to adults, the fact is that it is not really like children's speech at all.

## Conclusion

Finally we can consider the implications of this research for the teaching of writing. Being aware that children are doing something different in writing from speech may alert teachers to signs of development: instances of constructions that show a sensitivity to discourse structure, for example, may gleam through a piece that is badly written, poorly punctuated and atrociously spelt - and provide encouraging evidence that something is being learnt. Such awareness will allow teachers to make a differential response to errors - treating differently those that arise from haste or

carelessness and those that suggest the writer is trying out a new construction but has not got it right yet.

The fact that some of the grammatical developments in writing seem to arise from the need to structure a discourse coherently points to the importance of encouraging children to write continuous passages from an early age. Writing one-sentence responses to questions will not provide the stimulus necessary to develop these constructions. As children generally do not use many of the more typically written constructions in their speech, it follows that they need to learn them by reading extensively. It also highlights the value of the teacher reading aloud to the class, throughout the junior years and beyond, because, in this way, children are able to absorb structures of sentence and discourse organisation from written material that would be too difficult for them to read for themselves. This is particularly important for weaker readers. If their only experience of written language comes from the rather stilted prose of remedial reading schemes, then it is no wonder that their own writing is flat and dull.

We know that different types of writing have different patterns of organisation: that narratives are structurally different from descriptions, and so on. Therefore, it follows that children need to read and hear read not only stories but also as wide a range as possible of non-fiction, so that they have developed a feel for the necessary linguistic constructions before they are required to use them in their own writing.

Finally, at an International Writing Convention, I know it is not necessary to make a case for writing - but elsewhere there are people who argue that with the advent of telephones and tape-recorders the need for writing has greatly diminished. Quite apart from the practical disadvantages of dependence on such machines, I believe that the argument is seriously flawed. Writing is not merely a way of recording speech (a kind of

inefficient tape-recorder) but a different form of language in its own right which can lead to different ways of thinking. Because written language provides different opportunities from speech and imposes different requirements, it forces the writer to use language in different ways. These different experiences of language are then available to be fed back into speech. So, for some children at any rate, writing is not just a reflection or a record of their oral competence but is also an important agent in their language development. This suggests that it is dangerous to adopt a narrowly functional approach to the teaching of writing. Even if, as adults, we were to do no more writing than signing our Christmas cards, learning to write fluently and extensively would still be important because of its influence on both language and thinking.

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FOOTNOTES

1. I am very grateful to Robin Fawcett for allowing me to make extensive use of the speech transcripts and for generously providing me with copies of the children's writing.

2. When recorded, the children were within three months of 8, 10 or 12. So a reference to '8-year-olds', for example, encompasses children who may be aged between 7;9 and 8;3.

3. I am very grateful to Gordon Wells and Barry Kroll for providing me with copies of the children's writing and allowing me to quote from it.

Table 1. Oral constructions in the speech of children aged 8-12

Occurrence per hundred words

(Bracketed figures give number of instances)

| Construction | 8 yrs (No of words = 3010) | 10 yrs (No of words = 3926) | 12 yrs (No of words = 3768) |
|---|---|---|---|
| well | 0.86 (26) | 1.71 (67) | 1.20 (44) |
| this/these | 0.40 (12) | 0.76 (30) | 0.53 (20) |
| vague completer | 0.23 (7) | 0.46 (18) | 0.30 (10) |
| recapitulatory pronoun | 0.17 (5) | 0.13 (5) | 0.12 (4) |
| like | 0.07 (2) | 0.13 (5) | 0.19 (7) |
| sort of/kind of | 0.10 (3) | 0.13 (5) | 0.08 (3) |
| tag statement | 0.03 (1) | 0.13 (5) | 0.03 (1) |
| amplificatory NP tag | | 0.02 (1) | 0.05 (2) |
| TOTAL | 1.86 (56) | 3.46 (136) | 2.42 (91) |

Table 2. Redundancy-reducing constructions in children's speech and writing

Occurrence per hundred words

(Bracketed figures give number of instances)

| SPEECH | | | WRITING |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 yrs. | 0.10 | 0.14 | 8 yrs |
| (No. of words = 3010) | (3) | (2) | (No. of words = 1414) |
| 10 yrs. | 0.31 | 0.45 | 10 yrs |
| (No. of words = 3926) | (12) | (12) | (No. of words = 2677) |
| 12 yrs. | 0.24 | 0.60 | 12 yrs. |
| (No. of words = 3768) | (9) | (20) | (No. of words = 3348) |

Table 3. Discourse-structuring constructions in children's speech and writing

Occurrence per hundred words

(Bracketed figures give number of instances)

| SPEECH | | | WRITING |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 yrs. (No. of words = 3010) | 0.17 (5) | 0.28 (4) | 8 yrs. (No. of words = 1414) |
| 10 yrs. (No. of words = 3926) | 0.23 (9) | 0.49 (13) | 10 yrs. (No. of words = 2677) |
| 12 yrs. (No. of words = 3768) | 0.21 (8) | 1.11 (37) | 12 yrs. (No. of words = 3348) |

Table 4. Number of children in each age-group using literary constructions in writing

| | 8-year-olds | 10-year-olds | 12-year-olds |
|---|---|---|---|
| 'Formal' constructions | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Redundancy-reducing constructions | 2 | 7 | 7 |
| Discourse-structuring constructions | 4 | 8 | 11 |

Table 5. Time adverbials in children's speech and writing

| | SPEECH | | | WRITING | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 8 yrs | 10 yrs | 12 yrs | 8 yrs | 10 yrs | 12 yrs |
| then | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| when + finite clause | + | + | | + | + | + |
| first | | + | + | + | + | + |
| first of all | | + | + | + | + | + |
| at/in the end | | | + | | + | + |
| after + finite clause | | | | + | + | + |
| after that | | | | + | + | |
| after + NP | | | | | + | + |
| soon | | | | + | | |
| at the start | | | | + | | |
| last of all | | | | + | | |
| secondly | | | | | + | |
| next | | | | | + | |
| sometimes | | | | | + | |
| in time | | | | | + | |
| at the time | | | | | + | |
| straight away | | | | | + | |
| to begin with | | | | | + | |
| while + finite clause | | | | | + | |
| after + non-finite clause | | | | | + | |
| in the beginning | | | | | | + |
| afterwards | | | | | | + |
| eventually | | | | | | + |
| finally | | | | | | + |
| at last | | | | | | + |
| on the third go | | | | | | + |
| before + finite clause | | | | | | + |
| once + finite clause | | | | | | + |